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ABSTRACT

Research indicates a national trend of increasing violence among the juvenile population. This study examines and profiles adolescent restraining order defendants in one state. The study includes all adolescent defendants between the ages of 11 and 17 who had a restraining order issued against them during a 10-month period. This study examined the characteristics and patterns of adolescent batterers and the transmission of violence and abuse. The report is divided into three sections. Section one gives a general overview of the state's adolescent batterers' cases and their characteristics. Section two deals specifically with dating violence and section three addresses familial violence, with a special emphasis on parental abuse. Included in these sections are the age and gender of batterers, statistics on the location and conditions of the battery, and victims' comments on the batterer. The report concludes that the time of the issuance of the restraining order should be a time for intervention. The teenager must unlearn the abusive behavior and be taught the appropriate interpersonal techniques. Likewise, domestic violence prevention should precede the point at which a restraining order is issued. It is recommended that personnel in courts, law enforcement, schools, and social services be trained to deal with teenage battering. (RJM)

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Massachusetts Trial Court
Office of the Commissioner of Probation

Young Adolescent Batterers:

A Profile of Restraining Order Defendants in Massachusetts

April 14, 1994

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Young Adolescent Batterers:

A Profile of Restraining Order Defendants in Massachusetts

There is a current national trend of increasing violence among the juvenile population. Between 1987 and 1991, a 50% increase occurred in the number of juveniles arrested for violent crimes: The highest number of violent arrests in the history of the country (Allen-Hagen and Sickmund). In Massachusetts 30% of the 20,000 juvenile arraignments in 1993 were for violent offenses. Furthermore, 36% of the juveniles placed on Risk/Need probation in Massachusetts in 1993 and 38% of the juveniles committed to the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services in 1993 were convicted of a violent crime. Record amounts of juveniles are the victims and perpetrators of violence.

The violence is not limited to the streets but is also pervasive in juveniles' interpersonal relationships. National research conducted in the 1980s measured the prevalence of dating violence among high school students: Some studies measured prevalence rates as high as 41.3% (Sugarman and Hotaling). In self reported data 35% of adolescents mention at least knowing someone who experienced physical violence in a dating relationship (Roscoe and Callahan). Familial violence by adolescents, particularly against siblings and parents, is also prevalent, although difficult to measure because it is often "overlooked and under researched" (Gelles).

The Massachusetts Registry of Civil Restraining Orders, maintained by the Office of the Commissioner of Probation, provides a vehicle in which to investigate some of the types and characteristics of interpersonal violence among adolescents. It is a unique measure of the violence which occurs between teenagers and their family or intimates. Issues emerge with this population which must begin to be dealt with by criminal justice personnel and practitioners. The time of the issuance of the restraining order is an opportunity for intervention. Of paramount importance is preventing the adolescent from continuing this abusive behavior into adult relationships.

The goals of this study are to obtain a better understanding of the characteristics and patterns of adolescent batterers and the transmission of violence and abuse. Section I of this report gives a

general overview of Massachusetts' adolescent batterer's cases and characteristics; Section II deals specifically with dating violence; Section III deals specifically with familial violence.

Methodology

On September 8, 1992 the Massachusetts Commissioner of Probation in conjunction with the Department of Public Safety, implemented the Registry of Civil Restraining Orders: The nation's first statewide, centrally computerized, domestic violence record keeping system. The Registry was created in response to a need for a centralized database accessible by judicial and law enforcement agencies for the issuance and enforcement of domestic violence restraining orders. Data is entered into the registry on the same day that the order is issued by any one of the 97 District, Superior, and Probate courts throughout the Commonwealth.

The Massachusetts Registry is a unique vehicle for the identification of adolescent batterers. Prior research regarding teen batterers focused on high school or college students (Alexander, Moore and Alexander; Bergman; Sugarman and Hotaling; Roscoe and Callahan). These are skewed populations which completely omit teenagers who did not stay in high school and/or proceed to college. The Registry is a 100% catchment of adolescent restraining orders issued in the Massachusetts courts.

This study is an examination and profile of adolescent restraining order defendants in Massachusetts. The study includes all adolescent defendants between the ages of 11 and 17 who had a restraining order issued against them during the first 10 months of the registry's operation, from September of 1992 through June of 1993. The Registry is a computerized database containing information regarding the restraining order and the conditions of the order. The Registry is directly linked to the defendant's history of delinquency and offender characteristics such as age and sex.

For supplemental information the Office of the Commissioner of Probation collected complaint forms, restraining order forms, and affidavits from the local courts. Of the total adolescent restraining order population (n=757), 680 complaint forms and 655 order forms were collected, a response rate of 90% and 87%. These forms contain specific information regarding the conditions of the order and

the defendant-plaintiff relationship. The number of affidavits collected equalled 461, a 61% response rate. The affidavits contain summaries of the abusive incident(s) which necessitated the acquisition of a restraining order. Qualitative data from the affidavits are used as examples of the types of abuse occurring within the population. Information in the affidavits was also categorized and coded. It is important to note that in sections of this report based on affidavit information a negative response simply means that this characteristic or action was not mentioned in the affidavit, but does not necessarily mean it did not occur.

I. A Profile of Adolescent Restraining Order Defendants

> "Finally, he held the knife to his own wrist and I jumped in the car and started to leave. He sat on the trunk, but I kept driving and he showed me his bloody wrist. This is the 3rd time he pulls out a knife in my presence and threatens to kill himself."

> "Broke and entered our house and stole money from our daughter. He had been told to stay away from our house. . .he had kicked in a door trying to enter the house. My wife and he had an ensuing argument that resulted in pushing and shoving."

- excerpts from the affidavits of the girlfriend and parents of a 17 year old defendant, all from an affluent, west suburban community.

> ". . . He stabbed me a couple of times once on my index finger, on my arms, twice on my legs and constantly just hitting on me. He always thought I was cheating on him. I loved ( ) very much and I still do."

- excerpt from an affidavit filed in an inner city court by a girl against her 16 year old ex-boyfriend.

Between September of 1992 and June of 1993, 757 civil restraining orders were issued by the District and Probate courts against adolescents between 11 and 17 years of age. Most of them related accounts of abusive behavior similar to the excerpts above. Over 1,100 adolescents in Massachusetts annually commit domestic abuse and this number is only representative of reported cases. Studies of both dating and familial violence have found that adolescent interpersonal violence is highly under reported through official avenues (teacher, counselor, law enforcement), with estimated reporting rates ranging from 4 to 40% (Bergman, Pirog-Good and Stets, Pagelow, Gelles).

Age and Gender

Although the range in age of the defendants is between 11 and 17 years, most of the defendants (93.4%) were 15, 16, and 17 years old (see Table 1, below). These are young teenagers enmeshed in disruptive and violent interpersonal behavior. The majority of defendants, 77%, are males. However, females account for 23% of the adolescent restraining order defendants, making female defendants almost twice as prevalent among young adolescents than among the total civil restraining order population of which 13% are female.

Table 1: Age of Adolescent Restraining Order Defendants

Age	Frequency	Percent
11	1	.1%
12	3	.4%
13	10	1.3%
14	36	4.8%
15	79	10.4%
16	139	18.4%
17	489	64.6%
Total	757	100.0%

Patterns of Violence

For the majority of these young defendants, the restraining order is not the first indication of violent behavior. Over half (54%) of the adolescent restraining order defendants have a prior delinquency or adult arraignment for a violent offense. One quarter have 3 or more prior delinquency or adult arraignments for violent offenses. Seventeen percent have a prior arraignment for violating a civil restraining order. Nineteen percent are under probation supervision at the time that the order

is issued. The defendants are 15, 16, and 17 year olds who have already established patterns of violence and abuse. These defendants should be considered as real and dangerous threats to themselves and others.

Court Characteristics

Only 3.3% of the adolescent restraining order cases include mutual orders taken out by the defendant against the plaintiff. Almost 12% have a concurrent cases pending in Probate Court. The low occurrence of other types of civil cases, supports the fact that restraining orders are issued based on their own merit and are not simply extensions of other pending civil proceedings. Adolescent restraining orders are issued in numerous courts encompassing varying areas of the state. Table 2, below, gives a frequency distribution of the 10 courts, accounting for one-third of the total adolescent restraining order population, which issued the highest numbers of adolescent restraining orders.

Table 2: Top 10 Courts With the Highest Frequency of Adolescent Restraining Orders

Court	Frequency
Springfield District	43
Lowell District	27
Wareham District	26
Fall River District	25
Salem District	24
Dorchester District	24
Quincy District	24
Brockton District	21
Barnstable District	20
Taunton District	20

The majority of the initial temporary restraining orders (52.3%) are extended for a year. Twenty seven percent of the orders are vacated within the first two weeks. Twenty-one percent are vacated or are terminated sometime between two weeks and one year.

Conditions of Order

The most common court ordered conditions of adolescent restraining orders requested by a victim and granted by a judge are for the defendant to refrain from abuse (97.9%), for the defendant to have no contact with the plaintiff (81.5%), and for the defendant to vacate and/or stay away from the home of the plaintiff (81.5%). Table 3 depicts the rate at which each of the different conditions are ordered by the court. The conditions will be examined more indepth in later sections of this report.

Table 3: Conditions of Adolescent Restraining Orders

Condition	Percent
Refrain From Abuse	97.9%
No Contact	81.5%
Vacate/Stay Away	81.5%
Address Impounded	4.0%
Stay Away Work	9.9%
Surrender Custody	25.4%
Support Payments	.7%
Compensation	.4%
Other	27.2%

Defendant/Victim Relationship

Relationship information was distinguishable in 85.7% (n=648) of the cases. The majority of defendants (56.9%) and victims are currently in or used to be in a dating relationship with each other

(see Table 4, below). Family members are victims in 42.2% of the cases involving teenage batters. The relative most often victimized is a parent.

Table 4: Defendant-Victim Relationship

Relationship	Frequency	Percent
Parents	209	32.3%
Other Family	64	9.9%
Friend	6	.9%
Dating Relationship	369	56.9%
	648	100.0%

Specific characteristics regarding defendant/victim relationships will be discussed in the following sections on dating violence and familial abuse. The report divides abuse by young adolescent defendants into two sections regarding dating violence and familial violence. These sections are dealt with and discussed separately because both dating and familial abuse denote differing characteristics and implications.

II. Dating Violence

> ". . . he said that if I did not go out with him then he would rape me if he had to. I continued to tell him that I wanted nothing to do with him.."

-excerpt from an affidavit against a 14 year old defendant.

> ". . .pushed me into the bushes. I yelled for help and the defendant proceeded to cary (sic) me by my hair and shoulders to the corner of the streets. . . again took me by the head and dragged me down 15-20 cement stairs. While I was on the ground he continued to kick me."

-excerpt from girl's affidavit against her 17 year old boyfriend.

More than half (57%) of the restraining orders issued against teenagers in Massachusetts are concerning a dating relationship. In 10 months time at least 369 restraining orders were issued against teenagers for abusing their (ex)boyfriend/girlfriend. "Dating violence is not only important as a phenomenon in itself but also because it precedes marital violence and thus may provide a link in the intergenerational transmission of violence" (Alexander, Moore, Alexander). The following section examines some of the characteristics of these defendants and their abusive behavior.

Age and Gender

The majority (87%) of teenage batterers involved in dating violence are 16 and 17 years of age (see Table 5, on page 10).

Table 5: Age of Adolescent Batterers involved in Dating Violence		
Age	Frequency	Percent
13	3	.8%
14	15	4.1%
15	30	8.1%
16	74	20.1%
17	247	66.9%
	369	100.0%

Batterers are predominantly adolescent boys (80.8%); however, almost one-fifth of the orders are taken out by boys against girls. This later situation is illustrated in the following restraining order excerpt:

> ". . .showed up at my house and demanded I go back out with her. . .I tried to restrain her but she was kicking, punching, and scratching me. . .My mother received a phone call from ( ). When my mother said 'stop calling' she said, 'you listen here bitch, I will call whenever I want, I will come over whenever I want, I will see your son whenever I want, and I'm going to kill you and your son bitch.'"

Almost 13% of the orders taken out against teen batterers committing dating violence, have parents as the plaintiff on behalf of their child's welfare. These cases involve parents who felt the need to intervene in their child's personal relationships to prevent further physical and/or psychological abuse against their children. Such a case is illustrated in the excerpt below:

> ". . . threatened to kill my daughter and then take his own life if she ended their relationship. He has attempted to control her life by deciding who she could talk to, what she could wear and wanting to know her whereabouts at all times."

Conditions of Court Order

The most frequently requested and issued restraining order conditions against teens involved in dating violence are: for the defendant to refrain from abusing the victim (98.4%); for the defendant to have no contact with the victim (92.4%); and for the defendant to vacate and/or stay away from the victim's residence (90.8%). Table 6, below, depicts the most frequent conditions of teen dating restraining orders.

Table 6: Most Frequent Restraining Order Conditions Teen Batterers and Dating Violence

Condition	Percent
Refrain From Abuse	98.4%
No Contact	92.4%
Vacate/stay Away Residence	90.8%
Stay Away Work	15.4%
Surrender Custody	33.1%
Other	28.5%

Thirty-three percent of the restraining orders specify that the defendant must surrender custody of his/her children to the plaintiff. In these cases the plaintiffs are mostly young girls (80%) requesting sole custody of the children from the father. At least one-third of the adolescents involved in abusive relationships as teenagers already have children of their own.

Twenty-nine percent of the orders established 'other' conditions which are not explicitly delineated in the registry of civil restraining orders. The most common order in the 'other' category is to reiterate the no contact condition, whether it is via phone, letter, friends, or relatives. Almost 31.8% of the 'other' conditions are for defendants to have no contact with the victim at school or for the defendant to stay away completely from the school, even at times when the defendant is an enrolled student in the same school as the victim.

Patterns of Violence

Despite their young age, over half of the defendants involved in teen dating violence have amassed a history of violent delinquent and criminal behavior. Fifty-seven percent of the defendants have prior delinquent or criminal arraignments for a violent offense, and 19.8% have a prior arraignment for violation of civil restraining order. Patterns of violent delinquent and criminal behavior are more frequent among boys than among girls (63.8% versus 26.8%, respectively).

Abuse Characteristics

The remaining analyses in the dating violence section deal with variables extrapolated and coded from the plaintiff's affidavits (n=249). It is important to note that because a variable has a negative response it does not mean that it did not occur, it simply means that it was not mentioned in the affidavit. Taking this into consideration, statistics may represent underestimates of a variable's actual occurrence.

On the restraining order complaint forms, over 70% of the victims report that they were in fear of physical harm from the defendant. Slightly over 48% report that the defendant attempted to cause physical harm and 47% report that the defendant did cause physical harm. Boys were more frequently the defendant when physical harm was actually caused than girls (50.3% vs. 32.4%, respectively).

Similarly, information collected from restraining orders, in which affidavits were available, indicate that 73.4% of the victims report some type of physical abuse. Fifty five percent of the victims describe a history of abusive behavior where the current incident is not the first threat or instance of violence.

Other tactics of teenage abuse and harassment are mentioned in the affidavits. Fifty-six percent of the victims are threatened with physical violence or death. Almost one-third mention receiving annoying phone calls and one-quarter mention the defendant harassing family or friends to try to get to the victim. Even though these incidences are not literally physical abuse, they should not be overlooked. Past studies have shown that threats are used as strong and effective means by the batterer

to control the victim's behavior: it is the psychological equivalent of physical abuse (Bergman). Descriptions of abuse from the affidavits are useful in delineating some of the common ways that the teenage batterer manipulates, attacks, and abuses the victim.

Abuse and Weapons

In 17% of the affidavits, the use of a weapon is mentioned. Of those cases mentioning the use of a weapon, the weapon used most frequently (59.5%) is a knife or similar sharp instrument (see Table 7). In over one-fifth of the cases in which a weapon is used to perpetrate abuse, the weapon of choice is a gun. Young teenagers are being exposed to, intimidated by, and abused by their own peers in a manner similar to the following girl's experience with her boyfriend:

> ". . .telling me that if he can't have me no one can, then he preceded to put a gun up to my head and told me he would kill me."

Table 7: Weapons Used in Dating Violence

Weapon	Frequency	Percent
Firearm	9	21.4%
Knife	25	59.5%
Bat, stick, club	3	7.2%
Other weapon	5	11.9%
	42	100.0%

Instances of adolescent battering involving a weapon are more likely to result in actual physical harm to the victim (69.0% vs. 58.9%).

Location of Abuse

In 42% of the affidavits, the victim described the location where the abuse took place. The abuse occurred most often (66.2%) in a house or home of the defendant, plaintiff, or other relation (see Table 8). The next most likely places for the abuse to occur is at school (16.2%), outdoors or in a public place (10.3%), at the victims place of work (5.2%), and in a car (1.9%).

Table 8: Location of Abusive Incident
Teen Dating Violence

Location	Percent
Home/Residence	66.2%
School	16.2%
Outside/Public Place	10.3%
Work	5.2%
Car	1.9%

Of the locations where abuse takes place, the location where physical abuse is most frequently reported is in school. Eighty-four percent of the teenage dating violence occurring at school involves some type of physical violence. This is followed by 81% of victims abused in outdoor or public places, 50.0% of victims at work, and 58.5% of victims abused in a home or residence.

Incident Preceding Abuse

Another variable for which information was extrapolated from the affidavits is the incident which the victim mentions as preceding the onset of the most recent abuse. In only one-quarter of the affidavits was this variable distinguishable. The most common incident was a recent break-up of a relationship between the victim and defendant (47.8%) or a refusal by the victim to talk with or date the defendant (10.9%).

The interpersonal violence in the lives of adolescents is pervasive. Alternative means for dealing and coping within relationships must be learned to stop the patterns of violence. As depicted in the excerpt below, the issue of controlling another's behavior is a common theme in these abusive incidents:

> "He repeatedly told me he loved me and he was going to kill me if I went out with anyone else that if he couldn't have me no one could."

III. Familial Violence

> "He broke a bannister in the hallway and began to beat on the walls. . . He pulled a knife at me and threatened me. In the past he promised to blow my brains out."

-excerpt from an affidavit of a mother against her 16 year old son.

Almost one-third (n=273) of all adolescent restraining order defendants victimize a relative. Most frequently (76.6%) the restraining order is taken out against children for abusing their parents (see Table 9).

Table 9: Defendant - Victim Relationship
Family Abuse

Relationship	Frequency	Percent
Children - Parents	209	76.6%
Grandchild - Grandparent	4	1.5%
Siblings	32	11.7%
Niece/Nephew - Uncle/Aunt	8	2.9%
Cousins	6	2.2%
Other Family Members	14	5.1%
	273	100.0%

Parental Abuse

The most frequent type of familial abuse represented through the Registry of Civil Restraining Orders involves a child against a parent. This accounts for 79% of all familial abuse cases in the Registry. Because of the predominance of parental abuse, the majority of this section on family violence will only focus on instances of teens battering their parents.

Age and Gender

Sixty-one percent of defendants of parental abuse are 17 years of age (see Table 10). Another 32% are 15 and 16 year olds.

Table 10: Age of Parental abuse Defendants

Age	Frequency	Percent
13	3	1.5%
14	11	5.3%
15	32	15.3%
16	35	16.7%
17	128	61.2%
Total	209	100.0%

In the majority of parental abuse cases sons are the abusers and mothers are the victims. Sixty-four percent of the restraining orders are for sons abusing their mothers; 21% are for daughters abusing

their mothers; and 14% are for sons abusing their fathers. Very few cases of daughters abusing their fathers are reported. These families live in households of violence where the teenagers show no respect or consideration for their parents. In some families the situation becomes so out of control that the only recourse left for the parent is judicial intervention, as shown in the following excerpt.

> "Has bad temper when entertaining her friends. They run house and destroy property and won't pay attention to what I say. . .I have to go to my room and stay there. . .I am in constant fear of my daughter. She scares me and I am afraid of her when she gets mad."

Conditions of Restraining Order

The most frequent condition of restraining orders in parental abuse cases is for the child to refrain from abusing the parent, 98.6%, (see Table 11, on page 19). The majority of cases also order the defendant not to have any contact with the parent (60.8%) and to vacate and/or stay away from the parent's home (63.6%). The two prior conditions are less prevalent among parental abuse than in the general adolescent restraining order population. In cases where the defendant is ordered to vacate and/or stay away from the parent's residence, the situation is typically a mother who feels her son is out of control and it is necessary to get him out of the house and keep him away. This is needed for her own protection and often times for the protection of the defendant's younger brothers and sisters. The excerpt below, from a mother's affidavit against her 14 year old son, typifies this situation.

> "The defendant lit a fire in the bathroom. . . He also punched me in the face about 2 months ago, then told me later that night that he would do it again and that he didn't hit me with all his might that time. Two weeks ago he threw a glass of water in my face. . . His brother is afraid to stay alone with him. His sister also feels threatened by him."

Table 11: Most Frequent Restraining Order Conditions Adolescent Parental Abusers	
Condition	Percent
Refrain From Abuse	98.6%
No Contact	60.8%
Vacate/Stay Away Residence	63.6%
Surrender Custody	14.4%
Other	22.5%

Over 22% of the parental abuse restraining orders specify "other" conditions on the restraining orders. Thirty-five percent of the "other" conditions are to reiterate the no contact order and clarify that no contact means no contact in any manner. Thirty percent of the "other" conditions are to set the time and circumstances under which a teenager ordered to vacate a residence may pick up his or her belongings; often specifying police accompaniment.

Patterns of Violence

The teenagers committing parental abuse have past histories of violent behavior. Over half (53.1%) have a prior arraignment for a violent offense and 12% have a prior arraignment for violation of a restraining order. A slightly larger percent of teenage boys (56.4%) than teenage girls (41.3%) have amassed a history of violent delinquent and criminal activity.

Abuse Characteristics

The remaining analyses regarding parental abuse have been extrapolated and coded from the

plaintiff's affidavit (n=137). Thus, if a plaintiff neglected to mention any specific detail in the affidavit, the variable is coded as not having occurred. Due to this fact, frequencies of variables may be an under-representation of their actual occurrence.

On the complaint form, 77% of the parents reported that they are in fear of physical harm from their child. Forty-two percent reported that their son or daughter attempted to cause them physical harm and 33% reported that their son or daughter actually caused physical harm.

In 68% of the cases, in which affidavits were collected, some type of physical abuse by a teenager against a parent is mentioned. When abuse is reported the victim is almost always the mother. The most likely circumstance involving physical harm is of a son abusing his mother (63.9%). The next most likely circumstance is that of a daughter abusing her mother (22.1%). Sixty-six percent of parental abuse victims reported that this was not their child's first incidence of abusive behavior towards them.

Other commonly occurring abusive tactics carried out by teenage batterers against their parents include threats of serious injury or death (51.8%) and verbal abuse (47.4%). Twenty-eight percent harass other family members. Forty four percent of the parents report destruction of property by the defendant. In almost one-third of the affidavit's, the parent mentions having to call the police for intervention during their child's latest abusive episode.

Weapons and Abuse

Almost 18% of the affidavits mention a child using a weapon against their parent. Daughters use a weapon more frequently than sons (23.3% vs. 15.8%, respectively). The weapon used most often (41.7%) is a knife or similar sharp object (see Table 12, on page 21). A gun is used in 25% of the cases where a weapon is involved.

Table 12: Parental Abuse and Weapons		
Weapon	Frequency	Percent
Firearm	6	25.0%
Knife	10	41.7%
Bat, stick, club	5	20.8%
Other weapon	3	12.5%
	24	100.0%

Nearly one out of every five incidences of parental abuse by a teenager involves the use of a weapon against their parent such as indicated in the restraining order excerpt below.

> "( ) had an argument with my husband (his father) at which point the defendant was to leave the house which he refused. The argument became physical at this point and the defendant took a knife from the kitchen and threaten my husband with it said he was going to kill my husband and that if we called the police he would come back and kill us."

Location of Abuse and Incident Preceding Abuse

Incidences of parental abuse by teenagers almost always (98.5%) take place in the home. Most of the abusive incidents are preceded by the occurrence of some type of parent and child disagreement. Almost half (46.3%) are after the child disobeys a parental request and 14.9% are after parent-child verbal arguments.

Sibling Abuse

The next most frequent victim of battering by an adolescent relative is a sibling. In a majority of these cases brothers are the perpetrators and sisters are almost always the victim. In 56% of sibling abuse cases a brother is abusing his sister. In 31.2% of these cases a sister is abusing another sister. Abuse between siblings is the most frequent type of family violence, but is also the least likely to be reported (Pagelow). Society often perceives it to be somewhat "normal" for siblings to argue or fight; however, any type of violence is damaging. Below is one such example of an abusive sibling relationship which led a young girl to the courts for help.

> "I feel I need a restraining order against my sister because we are always fighting with each other and we can not get along. I have been in many fist fights with her and I want things to end."

Summary

This study has clearly depicted the seriousness of domestic violence among adolescents in Massachusetts. The myth that what is now considered stalking and abuse used to simply be means of flattering courtship is denounced by the accounts of the teenagers in this report. Tactics of manipulation, control and physical abuse are being used by and against teenagers at a critical and impressionable time in their lives. Through the use of restraining orders, their abusive behavior in interpersonal relationships is brought into the realm of the courts. These are 15, 16, and 17 year olds who have already established patterns of violence so early in their lives.

The restraining order should be used as a "red flag" to interpersonal violence by teenagers. The time of the issuance of the restraining order should be a time for intervention. Of paramount importance is the prevention of further abusive behavior as teenagers and prevention of the transmission of that behavior into their adult relationships. A major premise of intervention at this point is that it will be easier for a 15 year old to break the cycle of abuse than it will be for a 30 year old. The teenager must unlearn the abusive behavior and be taught appropriate interpersonal techniques.

Domestic violence prevention should precede the point at which a restraining order is issued. Personnel in courts, law enforcement, schools and social services must be trained to deal with teenage battering: Then, they must form partnerships to educate our children in the schools and community. Violence reduction training and programs that are found in some probation offices and school systems in Massachusetts should be expanded as a core operating procedure for all groups and agencies that deal with young adolescents. The lines of communication must be opened for teenagers to report abuse and seek help whether they are a victim, a batterer, or in many cases both. If , as prior research has documented, teenage battering is highly under-reported, those teenagers who do not report abuse must be reached through educational channels. Education should not be limited to the children, but must be available to the whole community, including parents who are in the best position to recognize the warning signs of abuse and who are often times themselves the victims of abuse.

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